



Floor Statement on Prescription Drug Coverage
U.S. Congressman Michael M. Honda
June 27, 2002

Mr. Speaker, the elderly and disabled have waited long enough for a prescription drug benefit in Medicare and for relief from the high cost of prescription drug prices. While the Republicans have been busy voting on permanent tax cuts and attending lavish fundraisers by the pharmaceutical industry, seniors throughout the country have been waiting for Congress to take action. All seniors need relief from prescription drug prices, and they need it now.

However, the Republican prescription drug bill completely fails the test of a real Medicare drug benefit. The Republican bill has no guaranteed minimum benefit, no guaranteed, affordable monthly premium, and no guarantee of fair drug prices. To add insult to injury, their bill leaves a huge coverage gap. Seniors who need more than \$2,000 worth of drugs must pay one hundred percent out-of-pocket, and keep paying premiums, until they reach the \$3,700 out-of-pocket cap.

Mr. Speaker, the Democrats have an alternative we had hoped to offer. Under the Democratic plan, seniors and individuals with disabilities will be able to keep making the choices that matter. Seniors will not be forced to join an HMO. They will not be forced to join a private insurance plan that will restrict their access to needed drugs, deny coverage for the medicine their doctors prescribes, or force them to change pharmacies. And unlike the Republican plan, our plan has no gap - beneficiaries will always have coverage.

But the Republican Leadership is denying Democrats the opportunity to offer our alternative. They are denying our right to participate in a fair, democratic debate about prescription drugs. The time is now for a real, meaningful, and affordable Medicare prescription drug benefit. Unfortunately, it looks like this Republican-led House won't be providing one anytime soon.